

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 AID-05 IO-13 ACDA-07 /082 W

-----115916 121007Z /14

R 120755Z AUG 77

FM AMEMBASSY MANILA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3692

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PBOR, MY, RP

SUBJECT: PRESS AND PUBLIC REACT FAVORABLY TO RENUNCIATION OF
SABAH CLAIM

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 5249; (B) KUALA LUMPUR 5112;

(C) MANILA 11749

1. SUMMARY: MANILA GUIDED PRESS HAS (PREDICTABLY) REACTED
POSITIVELY TO PRESIDENT MARCOS' ANNOUNCEMENT THAT HE WILL
INITIATE STEPS TO RENOUNCE FORMALLY THE PHILIPPINE CLAIM TO
SABAH. EDITORIALS AND COMMENTARIES HAVE FOCUSED ON PRACTICAL
DIVIDENDS LIKELY TO ACCRUE FROM REMOVAL OF LONG STANDING
PHILIPPINE/MALAYSIAN DISPUTE. MARCOS HAS BEEN LAUDED AS WELL
FOR SACRIFICING PHILIPPINE NATIONAL INTEREST IN ORDER TO
CONTRIBUTE TO ASEAN UNITY. THOUGH THERE HAS BEEN SOME
OPPOSITION TO MARCOS' DECISION, MOST NOTABLY BY FORMER
PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL AND THE SULTAN OF SULU, THERE SHOULD BE NO
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DOUBT THAT MARCOS WILL BE ABLE TO FULFILL HIS PROMISE
TO LAY TO REST PHILIPPINE CLAIM TO SABAH. END SUMMARY.

2. MANILA GUIDED PRESS HAS GIVEN EXTENSIVE FAVORABLE
COVERAGE TO PRESIDENT MARCOS' ANNOUNCEMENT THAT THE GOP
WILL MOVE TO FORMALLY DROP ITS CLAIM TO SABAH. EDITORIALS
AND COLUMNISTS HAVE UNANIMOUSLY PRAISED THE PRESIDENT'S

DECISION, EMPHASIZING THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS LIKELY TO ACCRUE FROM THE REMOVAL OF THIS IRRITANT BETWEEN THE PHILIPPINES AND MALAYSIA AND, PERFORCE, OBSTACLE TO THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF ASEAN. MAJORITY OF EDITORIALS AND COMMENTARIES HAVE FOCUSED ON THE POSITIVE EFFECT DECISION IS LIKELY TO HAVE ON ASEAN UNITY. DAILY EXPRESS CITED MARCOS' DECISION AS AN EXAMPLE OF A "SACRIFICE OF NATIONAL INTEREST FOR THE SAKE OF REGIONAL UNDERSTANDING... SO VITAL TO ASEAN AT THIS STAGE," WHILE THE TIMES JOURNAL LAUDED MARCOS FOR "CONTRIBUTING MUCH TO...REGIONAL UNITY."

3. THE PRACTICAL DIVIDENDS OF MARCOS' DECISION RECEIVED AN EQUAL IF NOT GREATER EMPHASIS IN PAPERS. EVENING EXPRESS EDITORIALY PREDICTED "HANDSOME DIVIDENDS FOR BOTH SABAH OR MALAYSIA AND THE PHILIPPINES IN THE FORM OF BENEFICIAL RELATIONS AND LARGER AREAS OF COOPERATION." BULLETIN TODAY OBSERVED THAT MARCOS' TRIP TO SABAH ENABLED HIM TO ASSESS FOR HIMSELF CONDITIONS THERE AND SPEAK WITH LOCAL OFFICIALS ABOUT MATTERS OF IMPORTANCE TO THE WELFARE OF THE PHILIPPINES, E.G. PHILIPPINE REFUGEES IN SABAH, PIRACY IN THE PHILIPPINE SABAH BORDER AREA, SMUGGLING, AS WELL AS THE PASSAGE OF ARMS THROUGH SABAH TO THE MNLF. NEGATIVE ASPECTS OF CONTINUED PURSUIT OF SABAH CLAIM WERE ALSO NOTED BY BULLETIN TODAY COLUMNIST APOLONIO BATALLA, WHO POINTED OUT LIKELY DIMINUTION OF PHILIPPINE "POWER" WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM THE DIVERSION OF ADDITIONAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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RESOURCES TO SUPPRESS THE MUSLIM REBELLION IN THE SOUTHERN PHILIPPINES IF SABAH WERE TO CONTINUE AS ENTREPOT FOR THE MNLF. BATALLA NOTED THAT "THE VALIDITY OF THE HISTORICAL CLAIM HAS BEEN ERODED BY LONG YEARS OF INACTION..." AND THAT CONTINUING THE CLAIM WOULD HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON THE PHILIPPINES' IMAGE.

4. POPULAR REACTION TO THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION APPEARS TO BE PREDOMINATELY FAVORABLE, THOUGH SEVERAL OPPOSITION LEADERS, MOST NOTABLY FORMER PRESIDENT MACAPAGAL, HAVE EXPRESSED MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE RENUNCIATION OF THE SABAH CLAIM. MACAPAGAL, WHO FIRST PRESSED PHILIPPINE CLAIM TO SABAH IN 1962, REPEATED HIS 1962 CONTENTION THAT "LEGALLY AND FACTUALLY, THE PHILIPPINES HAS A BETTER RIGHT TO SABAH THAN MALAYSIA" IN A LETTER TO THE PHILIPPINE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (A COPY OF WHICH HE PROVIDED TO THE CHARGE). HE ARGUED FURTHER THAT THE SABAH CLAIM "SERVES AS A LEVER OF STRENGTH" FOR DEALING WITH MALAYSIA OVER MALAYSIAN SUPPORT FOR THE MNLF AND THAT GIVING UP THE CLAIM WILL NOT, DESPITE MARCOS' OPPOSITE

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R 120755Z AUG 77
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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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CONTENTION, HELP SETTLE THE MINDANAO CONFLICT. FORMER
SENATOR AND PROMINENT MARCOS OPPONENT JOVITO SALONGA
TOLD A MEETING OF THE FOREIGN CORRESPONDENTS' ASSOCIATION
OF THE PHILIPPINES THAT IF MARCOS' ANALYSIS OF THE
RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SABAH CLAIM AND THE MINDANAO
CONFLICT IS INCORRECT, THE PHILIPPINES WILL HAVE
"IRRETRIEVABLY LOST SABAH AND HAVE ONLY AGGRAVATED THE
MUSLIM PROBLEM." HIS PRESCRIPTION IS TO "LEAVE THE CLAIM
AS IT IS."

5. PUBLISHED REPORTS INDICATE THAT MUSLIM REACTION TO
THE SABAH DECISION HAS ALSO BEEN PREDOMINANTLY POSITIVE.
THE PROVINCIAL AND CITY GOVERNMENTS OF MINDANAO AND THE
SULU ARCHIPELAGO HAVE, PROBABLY AT MANILA'S URGING,
ENDORSED THE PRESIDENT'S DECISION, ALTHOUGH SOME ADDED THE
CONDITIONS THAT MALAYSIA ENSURE THAT SABAH IS USED
NEITHER FOR TRAINING FOR THE MNLF NOR AS A BASE FOR
SMUGGLING AND THAT THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT STOP THE SUARA
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MALAYSIAN RADIO STATION, BASED IN SABAH, FROM TRANSMITTING

MNLF PROPAGANDA. TWO CONTRARY VOICES WERE HEARD HOWEVER. THE REIGNING SULTAN OF SULU REPORTEDLY STATED HE WILL ASSERT HIS "SOVEREIGNTY" OVER SULU IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE AGREEMENT BETWEEN HIS FATHER, THE PREVIOUS SULTAN, AND THE GOP WHEN THE FORMER CEDED THE SULTANATE'S RIGHTS TO SABAH TO THE GOP IN 1962. THE SULTAN CLAIMS THAT THE AGREEMENT ALLOWS HIM TO REASSERT "HIS SOVEREIGNTY OVER NORTH BORNEO" SHOULD THE GOP FAIL TO RECOVER THE TERRITORY. DR. ABUDULLAH MADALE, A VICE PRESIDENT OF MINDANAO STATE UNIVERSITY, REPORTEDLY CLAIMED THE REUNCIATION OF THE PHILIPPINE CLAIM COULD COMPLICATE THE MINDANAO CONFLICT. HE IMPLIED THAT BECAUSE PHILIPPINE MUSLIMS REGARD SABAH AS PART OF THE SULU SULTANATE, THEIR RESENTMENT OF THE GOP'S ACTION COULD REDOUND TO THE BENEFIT OF THE MNLF.

6. COMMENT: THOUGH THE EXACT MECHANISM BY WHICH MARCOS WILL LEGALLY RENOUNCE THE PHILIPPINE CLAIM TO SABAH HAS NOT BEEN ANNOUNCED -- MARCOS HAS INDICATED HE WILL CALL HIS BATASAN BAYAN (ADVISORY COUNCIL) INTO SESSION IN LATE AUGUST AND THAT A NATIONAL REFERENDUM MAY BE NECESSARY -- IT IS CLEAR THAT HE INTENDS TO RENOUNCE FORMALLY THE SABAH CLAIM. THE OPPOSITION OF MACAPAGAL AND THE SULTAN OF SULU WILL CERTAINLY NOT STOP MARCOS. IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THE SULTAN'S REMARKS ARE DESIGNED TO LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR THE TOUGH BARGAINING AHEAD BETWEEN THE SULTAN AND THE MALAYSIAN GOVERNMENT OVER A FINANCIAL SETTLEMENT TO THE SULTAN'S FAMILY FOR SABAH (REFTEL C).

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